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## FRANCIS BRET HARTE

The story of California forms one of the most interesting and romantic of all the states in the Union, and the quest of the Argonauts of '49 is by far the most fascinating chapter in California's history. This state was early settled by the Spaniards, but they made slow progress in developing the country. It remained for the discovery of gold in El Dorado County to hasten the development of California and to impart to its history special interest and romance. The revolutionary action of John Charles Fremont, the Pathfinder, which resulted in the cession of this Mexican territory to the Union, had already prepared the way for the rapid tide of immigration which then set in to the Pacific Coast. The discovery of gold of course imparted additional impetus to this tide and brought a vast horde of adventurers to this El Dorado. Cities sprang up by magic, as it were by night, and what but a short while before was a vast primeval forest soon blossomed into a cultivated land of fertile fields waving their golden harvests of grain and of orchards laden with their ripe luscious fruits. Great engineering enterprises were undertaken and streams turned out of their natural courses to do man's bidding; and thus an immense new commonwealth was created out of a vast wilderness.

There were two routes from the East to this wonderful new land of the Golden Fleece,—the one a waterway by Cape Horn and the other the overland trail. But either of these routes entailed severe hardships and untiring endurance on the part of the pioneers, and it was only the fittest that survived the difficulties and hardships of the voyage by sea or of the overland journey. So the pioneers who reached California were a husky and sturdy folk capable of untold endurance and as distinctive as the companions of Jason. Those who made their way to California in '49 were, for the most part, men of education and not a few college graduates. Yet among the men of education and character were some also of the baser sort, some even of the criminal class. All, however, both cultured and degraded, tended toward a lower level of living and thinking under the

primitive conditions of that pioneer life, when freed from the refining influences of the home. The life of the Argonauts, therefore, was less restrained by social conventions and wilder than that of almost any other American pioneers. The mad rush for gold served to intensify their innate vices as well as to develop acquired vices, like gambling, which was rife among them. Yet it must not be inferred that the Argonauts were all human degenerates destitute of virtues, for such an inference would do them unspeakable injustice and be absolutely false. These new-comers soon after their arrival established certain social and moral standards and even administered their crude forms of justice with a remarkable degree of impartiality and equity. Their improvised laws were executed through their vigilance committees,—an institution serving as a court of justice.

# I

Now this pioneer life on our Pacific Coast, fortunately, has been raised to the dignity of literature and preserved through the writings of Francis Bret Harte, who knew that life intimately from actual experience and observation and who has written of it as one to the manner born. Bret Harte, as he is generally called, was born in Albany, New York, in 1836. His father, Henry Harte, who died young, was an accomplished scholar and teacher, being an instructor in the Albany Female Academy, then a noted school, and later conducted a private school of his own in that city. But despite his intellectual gifts Henry Harte was not a successful man, and upon his death in 1845 he left his family of a wife and four children unprovided for and they consequently had to undergo many privations.

Young Bret Harte was a precocious and studious child, but did not enjoy robust health. At the tender age of six, his biographers inform us, he read Shakespeare and Froissart and the following year, in the well-selected library his father had accumulated, the lad of seven made the acquaintance of Dickens, reading *Dombey and Son*. This is significant because he was to be more profoundly influenced by Dickens than by any other author he ever read. After this he came to make the acquaintance of Fielding, Goldsmith, Smollett, Cervantes, and

Washington Irving of his own country. When fourteen years old, the boy began the study of Greek and made rapid progress. In his early youth, even at the age of eleven, Bret Harte gave evidence of his ambition to become an author by writing a poem "Autumnal Musings," which he sent surreptitiously to the *New York Sunday Atlas*, and he had the gratification and honor of seeing it appear in the next issue. A much longer effusion entitled "The Hudson River," which he wrote when he was sixteen, he never published, though he profited by his mother's criticism of it.

At the age of thirteen Bret Harte was compelled by pecuniary reasons to retire from school and to work for his living. He thereupon entered a lawyer's office where he remained a year and went thence to a counting-room of a merchant. By the time he was sixteen years old, he had become self-supporting. Then it was that his mother, in company with some friends and relatives, decided to move to California to make her home there with her elder son Henry, leaving behind Francis Bret with his younger sister, who was at school. Young Bret and his sister followed a few months later when the session closed, going by way of the Nicaragua route, then a popular though long and tedious journey across the Isthmus of Panama and thence by boat to San Francisco. Accordingly, in March, 1854, this callow youth of eighteen winters arrived, unheralded, in the Golden City. The day after his arrival he made his way with his sister across the Bay to Oakland and joined his mother, who had in the meantime married again,—her second husband being Colonel Andrew Williams. Like Thackeray, Bret Harte was fortunate in his step-father, who was a man of parts and held in high esteem. Bret made his home at his step-father's and soon found employment, first as a tutor and then as a clerk in an apothecary's shop. From this year dates his career as a professional writer, since he now first began to contribute poems and sketches of California life to various periodicals, as a means of support.

Bret Harte's income from his pen, however, was not yet sufficient to insure him a support he could depend upon. As a less precarious means of existence he served for a while as an

express messenger on a route along the upper coast of California and then entered the office of the *Humboldt Times* in the town of Union, in the northern part of the state, and learned the printer's trade. After this he taught school and later served as a printer's devil, compositor, and assistant-editor, in succession, in the office of the *Northern Californian*, published in Eureka. It was while he was acting editor of this paper that he came near being mobbed for an outspoken, courageous editorial he published, scathingly condemning the act of certain citizens in the neighborhood of Eureka for murdering some Indians. The timely arrival of some United States cavalymen happily averted the threatening danger and Bret Harte was summarily relieved of the duties of his office that had been thrust upon him by the editor's absence. On his return to San Francisco the young journalist's *wanderjahr* was ended, after he had seen California life in its varied aspects,—on the coast, in the interior, on the ranch, in the mine, and in the city. From this time forth Bret Harte's activities in California were to be circumscribed, being confined to San Francisco and vicinity.

Bret Harte now obtained a position as typesetter in the office of the *Golden Era*, but in a short while was promoted from the compositor's stand to be the editor of this sheet. During his tenure of this office he published in the columns of the *Golden Era* some of his early sketches, such as *In a Balcony*, *A Boy's Dog*, *M'liss* and some of his *Condensed Novels*. It was his practice to publish these sketches at first anonymously, but later gaining confidence he signed his contributions "B" and then "Bret." Emboldened by his success during his connection with the *Golden Era* he felt that his income justified him in marrying. Accordingly in 1862 he married Miss Anna Griswold, of New York. Two years after his marriage he was appointed Secretary of the California Mint—an office he continued to hold till his departure from the state in 1870. The appointment was fortunate for him, since by it he was enabled to provide for his growing family without depending upon the meagre and uncertain emoluments of literature. At the same time the duties of his office were not exacting, so that he had no inconsiderable time at his disposal for cultivating his gifts as a writer. He did

not go much into society, but he cultivated a few notable friends, such as the Reverend Thomas Starr King and Mrs. Jessie Benton Fremont, the wife of the famous Pathfinder. It was this clever and kind-hearted woman who often helped the struggling young author with her frank criticism, sympathy, and encouragement. Through her friendly offices Bret Harte attained the distinction of being counted among the contributors to the *Atlantic Monthly* as the author of *The Legend of Monte del Diabolo* published in that magazine in 1863.

In 1864 *The Californian* was established and among its first contributors were Bret Harte and Mark Twain, who was then on the Pacific Coast making a name for himself as a writer. These two coming authors happened to be engaged in journalistic work at the same time in San Francisco,—Bret Harte writing for *The Californian* and Mark Twain reporting for *The Morning Call*,—when they were first introduced to each other. Mark Twain regaled Harte with his famous story of “The Jumping Frog” and Harte thereupon induced him to publish it in *The Californian*. This literary sheet, however, was not destined to enjoy a long lease of life. William Dean Howells wittily said of it, apropos of Mark Twain’s and Bret Harte’s writings for it: “These ingenuous young men, with the fatuity of gifted people had established a literary newspaper in San Francisco, and they brilliantly coöperated to its early extinction.” The article Harte contributed to the initial number of *The Californian* was entitled *Neighborhoods I Have Moved From*; and this was followed by the *Ballad of the Emu*, both published anonymously. Subsequently he contributed to this same page, before its early extinction, many essays, poems, and sketches, including some additional *Condensed Novels*.

A contemporary San Francisco journalist, Noah Brooks, describes Bret Harte’s laborious and self-critical manner of composition thus: “Scores of writers have become known to me in the course of my long life, but I have never known another so fastidious and so laborious as Bret Harte. His writing materials, the light and heat, and even the adjustment of the furniture of the writing-room, must be as he desired; otherwise he could not go on with his work. Even when his en-

vironment was all that he could wish, there were times when the divine afflatus would not come and the day's work must be abandoned. . . . 'It's no use, Brooks,' he would say. 'Everything goes wrong; I cannot write a line. Let's have an early dinner at Martini's.' As soon as I was ready we would go merrily off to dine together, and having recovered his equanimity, he would stick to his desk through the later hours of the night, slowly forging those masterpieces which cost him so dearly."

In the year 1867 Bret Harte published the first collection of his poems under the title *The Lost Galleon and Other Tales*; and about the same time he issued his first book of prose containing his *Condensed Novels* (previously mentioned) and *Bohemian Papers*. This was not a very plethoric volume, as he described it. In this collection of verses were included his patriotic poems *The Reveille*, *John Burns of Gettysburg*, and others, as well as his very popular dialect poem *The Society upon the Stanislaus*, which held out the promise of something even better to follow. That something better did follow very shortly in the *Heathen Chinnee*, the most famous poem Bret Harte ever wrote. Another poem worthy of special mention in this connection and generally admitted to represent the high-water mark of its author's poetic talent is *Relieving Guard*, noted for its genuine poetic feeling and written in memory of his friend Starr King. This first collection of his poems demonstrated beyond question Bret Harte's originality, gift of humor, and range in poetic utterance. In certain of them also his use of local slang was decidedly piquant and picturesque and constituted no insignificant element of their popularity.

In July, 1868, the *Overland Monthly* was founded by a San Francisco bookseller and Bret Harte was selected as the man, above all others, whose reputation best qualified him to be the editor. It was intended that this new magazine on the Pacific Coast should ultimately rival the prestige and distinction enjoyed by the *Atlantic Monthly* as a literary journal in the East. Bret Harte himself chose the name for this celebrated magazine and in a moment of inspiration designed the characteristic vignette of the historical grizzly bear on the railroad track defying the progress of civilization. Mark Twain, in a letter to Thomas

Bailey Aldrich, apropos of this vignette, remarked that it was "the prettiest fancy and neatest that ever shot through Bret Harte's brain"—"the ancient symbol of California savagery snarling at the approaching type of high and progressive civilization, the first overland locomotive." When the first number of the *Overland Monthly* was issued, the editor experienced a feeling of regret and disappointment because it did not contain any distinctive California romance. This he regarded as a sad defect. To supply this regrettable omission, in the next number he set resolutely to work and produced *The Luck of Roaring Camp*.

It is a singular incident of this famous story that when the proof-sheets were submitted to the office, they were handed, not to the editor-author,—the usual course,—but to the publisher, and were accompanied with a note saying that the "matter was so indecent, irreligious and improper that the proof-reader, a young lady, could with difficulty be induced to read it." Despite this protest the publisher determined to stand by the literary judgment of his editor, and so the story appeared in the magazine without the alteration of a word. *The Luck of Roaring Camp*, it is true, met with a frosty reception in California and was denounced by the religious press as immoral and unchristian. In the East, on the contrary,—much to the delight of the author,—the story awakened great enthusiasm and was warmly welcomed. In the general introduction to his collected works published years later Bret Harte remarked of *The Luck*, "the East welcomed the little foundling of Californian literature with an enthusiasm that half frightened its author." Indeed, so favorable was the general verdict of the East that the editor of the *Atlantic Monthly* immediately sent Bret Harte an urgent request on the most satisfactory terms to write a similar story for the *Atlantic*. Needless to add that Bret Harte construed this request as ample justification of his own literary judgment amid the storms of criticism his story evoked in California and as a welcome vindication of his act in publishing *The Luck*.

*The Luck of Roaring Camp* established its author's literary reputation speedily throughout the entire country and incidentally was the making of the *Overland Monthly*. It is authori-



tatively reported that "two months after its appearance, a single news-company in New York was selling twelve hundred copies of the magazine." Yet, despite the flattering reception everywhere accorded this excellent story, except in California, Bret Harte did not immediately produce another sketch and in reality six months elapsed before he followed up his first triumph with a second—*The Outcasts of Poker Flat*. This last story is considered by many critics the best Bret Harte ever wrote. After this *Miggles*, *Tennessee's Partner*, and other sketches followed from his facile pen in quick succession. Then appeared in the *Overland*, in 1870, that felicitous extravaganza previously mentioned, *Plain Language from Truthful James*, or the *Heathen Chinees*, as it is more popularly known, and Bret Harte's name became all but a household word throughout the United States by reason of the fame of this poem. It is an interesting fact attested by the author himself that just after the writing of the *Heathen Chinees* Bret Harte deemed it unworthy of a place in the *Overland* and only admitted it into his magazine after much persuasion by his friend Ambrose Bierce. The fact is, the author himself never did set much value upon this skit expressing in verse his view of the Chinese problem in California and thought its popularity out of all proportion to its real merits. The poem owed no little of its popularity probably to the happy coincidence of its appearance with the time that the Chinese problem was beginning to arrive at the acute stage on the Pacific Slope; for in the last analysis the poem appears to possess but slight literary worth and certainly cannot be regarded as of a high type of poetry. It is cleverly done, to be sure, but is hardly worthy of the reputation it enjoys. Yet it caught the popular ear and its satire demonstrated more conclusively perhaps than argument could the local prejudice against the Chinese and the weakness of their opponents who disparaged and decried their character. But Bret Harte holds no brief for the Chinaman and appears impartial in his attitude, neither approving nor condemning him. Nevertheless as he states the case against the Chinaman, he does it with a poetic insight and sympathy so that he seems to be presenting a plea for him.

It is singular that the Pacific Coast did not appreciate Bret

Harte after all he had done to embalm in literature the various early types that were to be found in that melting-pot of the Union in the pioneer days. As a writer he assuredly deserved the gratitude of his fellow-countrymen, if for no other reason, at least for the high tone and dignity of his sketches of that pioneer life,—for his literary achievement. Yet it is a fact that California accorded him slight recognition of his literary gifts and achievements; and no one, we may assume, felt this lack of appreciation more keenly than Bret Harte himself. It is probable that his appointment as Professor of Recent Literature in the University of California, which he received in 1870, may have been intended to atone in a measure for that neglect; but this honor appears not to have afforded the desired balm. For in February, 1871, Bret Harte left San Francisco—never to return—after a residence of seventeen years in California, during which period he had made a reputation for himself as a man of letters equaled by no other American west of the Rockies. Even at present Bret Harte is not esteemed in California very highly. Not a few Californians appear to regard him with cold indifference, if indeed they do not entertain a feeling of antipathy toward him on the ground that he is not a truly representative Californian writer. They seem to think that his sketches purporting to be from life were a reflection upon the character of their early settlers, the Argonauts. Obviously this supposition is far-fetched and not warranted.

Some critics think that Bret Harte showed his good sense and wisdom in leaving California when he did. They maintain that had he remained there permanently, his art would have deteriorated and consequently he would have failed to sustain his reputation as a writer. Apropos of this view Mme. Van de Velde observes: "It was decidedly fortunate that he [Bret Harte] left California when he did, never to return to it; for his quick instinctive perceptions would have assimilated the new order of things to the detriment of his talent. As it was, his singular retentive memory remained unbiased by the transformation of the centers whence he drew his inspiration. California remained to him the Mecca of the Argonauts." Be this as it may, at all events the California chapter in Bret Harte's career was

closed never to be reopened, and when he left the Pacific Coast he burnt his bridges behind him. For, although on his departure for the East, he left many friends in California, it is alleged that he did not communicate with them afterward and apparently ignored them. If this be true, perhaps it serves to explain in part the indifference, not to use a harsher term, with which the Californians are reputed to regard Bret Harte.

## II

Before his departure from San Francisco Bret Harte had been in correspondence with some persons in Chicago who proposed to establish a new literary journal—to be called the *Lakeside Monthly*—of which he was to be the editor. But the project, for some reason or other, was abandoned and therefore Bret Harte made his way to New York without any very definite plans for the future. In New York he led a kind of Bohemian life, occupying himself with his pen and yet having no assured income from his writings. It seems to have been his usual practice to sell his literary productions outright to the publishers, so that he received no royalties from his previous work. He continued to contribute to the *Atlantic Monthly*; and to supplement his uncertain income from this source, he decided to enter the lyceum field with a special lecture on the subject of the Argonauts of '49. He made a tour of the country east of the Mississippi, delivering this lecture in a number of cities, but without any marked success. He did not make a success on the lecture platform, not that he was without skill as a *raconteur*, but chiefly because he was lacking in the art and graces of elocution. He then accepted a contract, good for one year, from the publishers of the *Atlantic Monthly* to write exclusively for that journal, whether little or much, at the munificent salary of \$10,000. Under this contract his output for the year included the following: of stories, *The Poet of Sierra Flat*, *Princess Bob and Her Friends*, *The Romance of Madroño Hollow*, *How Santa Claus Came to Simpson's Bar*; and of verse, *A Greyport Legend*, *A Newport Romance*, *Concepcion de Arguello*, *Grandmother Tenterden*, *The Idyl of Battle Hollow*. This was surely a creditable year's work and a satisfactory *quid pro quo*. It is

worthy of note that most of these productions—certainly all of the stories—were indebted to their author's California experiences for their inspiration. One of the stories, *How Santa Claus Came to Simpson's Bar*, is universally conceded to rank among Bret Harte's best tales.

For seven years Bret Harte lived in the East, spending his winters in New York City and his summers in Newport, New London, and elsewhere. One summer he spent at Cohasset, on the seashore near Boston, where he had Lawrence Barrett and Stuart Robson, the actors, for neighbors and friends; and for Robson he wrote the play *Two Men of Sandy Bar*. This play was produced at the Union Square Theatre, New York, in 1876, but did not permanently hold the boards. In collaboration with Mark Twain Bret Harte wrote a melodrama called *Ah Sin*, but this proved to be a failure. Later, in collaboration with his friend and biographer Pemberton, Bret Harte dramatized his story *The Judgment of Bolinas Plain*, giving it the title *Sue*. This play was successfully produced both in the United States and in England; and yet it was only a modified success and has not established itself as a classic. It was Bret Harte's lifelong ambition to write a notable play, but the would-be playwright never produced a play that kept the boards permanently, and so never had his ambition gratified.

Bret Harte seemed to be happy in New York, certainly much more so than he had been in California. Yet here as there he never solved the problem of living within his income, and his debts harassed him. Even his recourse to the lecture platform to supplement his income from his pen did not suffice to furnish the desired freedom from financial cares. He applied himself with all diligence and from his prolific pen came the long story *Gabriel Conroy* of the proportions of a novel, which he published in *Scribner's Magazine*, in 1876. It is interesting to observe that this was the only novel he ever wrote, and though it contained some fine features, as a novel it was a failure. For the leading character of his novel he turned to New England and undertook to portray a typical New England woman in his heroine Joan, but without success. He knew the California type of woman better than he did the New England. However, it is

due Bret Harte to say that he had previously acquitted himself with credit in his portrayal of the New England schoolmistress, Miss Mary, in his early story *The Idyl of Red Gulch*. But Joan as a creation of his mature genius fails to measure up to the promise contained in his early sketch of Miss Mary. Bret Harte was more in sympathy, perhaps, with the Cavalier than with the Puritan. At all events he was happier in drawing the character of the Southerner typified by Colonel Starbottle in his California sketches than he was in portraying any New England character. Colonel Starbottle must have been a favorite with Bret Harte as well as with his readers, for he reintroduced him in his last unfinished story, which he began just before his death. As a creation Colonel Starbottle is a more picturesque figure than either Jack Hamlin or masterful Yuba Bill, two rival heirs of our author's invention.

### III

On learning of Bret Harte's heroic struggle to keep his head above water his friends came to his rescue and procured for him from President Hayes an appointment as consul to Crefeld, Germany. This was during the period when our Government occasionally bestowed its consular offices as a reward for literary excellence—a practice now discontinued, fortunately for the service. Bret Harte's strained circumstances dictated his cheerful acceptance of this post, and so leaving his wife and children at Sea Cliff, Long Island, he soon set out for England, *en route* to Crefeld, near Cologne. He arrived there in July, 1878, and entered upon his duties as consul. Walking along the main street of Crefeld one melancholy day, he espied in the window of a bookshop a German translation of his stories, and this brought comfort and cheer to the homesick exile. On a vacation to England in 1878 to visit his friend James Anthony Froude, Bret Harte arranged for the publication of a volume of his stories and poems. On this same visit he also arranged for a lecture tour of England, which turned out to be entirely successful, bringing him in considerable money. It is to be said to his credit, however, that during his two years tenure of his Crefeld post he performed his consular duties with satisfaction to our State

Department, and in 1880 was promoted to the more lucrative and desirable consulship at Glasgow. This post was far more to his liking and he held it for five years, till a change of administration in 1885. In Glasgow Bret Harte had an opportunity to meet many congenial English men of letters, such as Walter Besant, William Black, and others. Here he also gathered new material for his literary work, as evidenced by *A Rose of Glenbogie*, *The Heir of the McHulishes*, *The Ghosts of Stukeley Castle*, and *Young Robin Gray*—his Scotch stories which are native to the soil. These charming stories demonstrate that Bret Harte could write about other regions than California.

After his retirement from the Glasgow consulship Bret Harte did not return to his native country, but voluntarily expatriated himself, making his home in London. His biographers suggest that it was for pecuniary reasons that he decided to live in England. Whatever the cause, the fact remains that from the time of his departure for Crefeld in 1878 to the day of his death at Mme. Van de Velde's at Camberley, in May, 1902, Bret Harte never once returned to his native land. Manifestly he was quite eccentric, for otherwise he would not have separated himself from his family during his twenty-four years' residence abroad, preferring not to live with his kith and kin, and that, too, even though they had moved to England a few years before his death. The English people were always very cordial to Bret Harte and quick to recognize and appreciate his literary merits,—perhaps more so than his fellow-countrymen,—and this may have been a factor in his decision to adopt England as his home.

#### IV

Bret Harte's achievement was noteworthy, both in prose and verse. But his work in fiction was rather narrow, because nature did not generously endow him with the gift of creative imagination. He seemed not to have possessed the requisite faculty for creating an enduring character in literature. He had the faculty for inventing striking situations and episodes in which his men and women act, rather than the faculty for creating and developing characters. His faculty, as Merwin observes, was not so much that of imagining as of apprehending human character.

Consequently, Bret Harte presented his characters through the medium of a short story, not through the medium of a novel. Like Poe, he did not succeed with the novel. Bret Harte wrote a single novel and that was sufficient to teach him his limitations. Of his long stories *Cressy* perhaps deserves to rank first; but this is really a short story expanded. He had the knack of sometimes expanding a short story, as he did in the case of *M'liss*, but not to advantage from the point of view of art. He had the power of drawing his characters with a few masterly strokes, and for this he needed of course a dramatic situation or episode, which is a characteristic feature of the short story. But he lacked the power of revealing his characters in a succession of situations, or in an intricate plot, so as to present his characters in a progress of growth and development. It is a peculiarity of his art that his characters stand fully revealed after a few incidents and do not therefore require a long story with a complex plot to make themselves known to us. For his characters are for the most part, as it were, portraits copied from life and were not invented as a product of his imagination. His characters were in keeping with his type of mind, which was perceptive, rather than analytical, like Poe's or Hawthorne's mind.

Bret Harte's stories—at least some of them—have been criticised on the ground of their immoral tendency. But this criticism seems somewhat superficial and is hardly founded on fact. For analysis shows that the alleged depravity of Bret Harte's characters is more apparant than real; and even though they appear vicious and depraved, still they not infrequently challenge our admiration by some daring deed of heroism or self-sacrifice. Some critics are of the opinion that the wickedness of Bret Harte's villains is only a quality imputed to them by their author to heighten their interest for us. Certainly the lasting impression we get from Bret Harte's stories is not that of immorality, even if he does sometime exalt his villain into a hero. When the author himself was reproached with this reputed defect of his stories, he wrote in reply, in the general introduction to his collected works: "When it shall be proved that communities are degraded and brought to guilt and crime, suffering or destituton, from a predominance of this quality; when he

shall see pardoned ticket-of-leave men elbowing men of austere lives out of situation or position, and the repentant Magdalen supplanting the blameless virgin in society, then he will lay aside his pen and extend his hand to the new Draconian discipline in fiction. But until then, he will, without claiming to be a religious man or a moralist, but simply an artist, reverently and humbly conform to the rules laid down by a Great Poet who created the parables of the Prodigal Son and the Good Samaritan, whose works have lasted eighteen hundred years, and will remain when the present writer and his generation are forgotten."

The real objection to Bret Harte's stories should be grounded, not in their immoral tendency, but in a defect of his art. It is not that his villains are portrayed as too bad. It is rather that his villains are not quite true to nature. They are impossible villains,—mere figments of their author's fancy,—and furthermore there is something theatrical in their constitution. They have an element of artificiality and do not ring true. This results from a defect in Bret Harte's art. Akin to this is another artistic defect found in the sentimentality of some of his characters. This is manifested particularly in the author's stressing the duty of charity to the publican and sinner. Here he shows the dominance of his master Dickens's influence from whom he caught the trick. We see it even in the above quotation which is truly Dickensese both in tone and manner. For Bret Harte, like Dickens, was a sentimentalist and his stories reflect their author's disposition in their occasional cant and maudlin sentimentality. But it does not follow that all of Bret Harte's stories exhibit this mawkish sentimentality. Far from it. It is only in some of his inferior stories that we encounter this element. It does not appear in his best tales, for these are of a high order of art, unlike any other author's, and hardly suffer by comparison with the best in American literature. Bret Harte was an artist and never wavered or wearied in his devotion to his art, subjecting his work to his own relentless criticism. He had the artist's vision of that ideal beauty of perfection that ever inspires and beckons and yet ever eludes one's grasp.

It is a moot question whether Bret Harte will make his appeal to posterity mainly through his prose, or through his verse.



His poetic output is small, however, as compared with his prose. Still his poetic achievement is not insignificant or mediocre. He shows a wider range in his verse than in his prose. In his humorous dialect rhymes he is especially good, and he was a born parodist. Indeed in this field he has few equals. His humor never deserts him and is sometimes his saving grace. By it he is enabled to reveal the personality of his characters and to interpret the lives of the pioneers to us. Nor is the type of humor that he exhibited characterized by grotesqueness and exaggeration, as American humor has generally been from Franklin down. Bret Harte's was the distinctive California humor that minimizes rather than exaggerates. It was not saturnine or satirical, but tender and pathetic. Somehow, he blends pathos with his humor and withal shows a keen appreciation of nature. Of course, his humor is diffused through his prose as well as through his verse.

Bret Harte's poetry is more noted for its tender simplicity than for its originality. And yet it is by no means destitute of originality. Witness his famous *Heathen Chinee* expressed in the form of Swinburne's noble rhythm. For perfection of form and dramatic quality his dialect poems are especially noteworthy. He expresses a deep note of personal feeling in some of his poems, as, for example, those on the death of Dickens and Starr King. Of these two brief poems, the latter, which he entitled *Relieving Guard*, is exquisitely concise and simple in its expression of subdued feeling. In his national or patriotic poems, exemplified by *The Reveille*, he rises to the true lyrical note, as his utterance swells and glows with emotion. Emotion is a prominent characteristic of Bret Harte's poetry, anyway. In interpreting nature to us it was his method to reproduce the emotional effect that he himself had previously experienced ; and thus he presented nature to his readers in the same mood in which she had appeared to him. Himself a child of nature, he delighted to commune with her and to exhibit her in her manifold and varied aspects.

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